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Section V

Student Development: Intellectual Growth & Writing

A major tradition of higher education is excellence in written expression. In part, the tradition continues because many scholars are excellent writers and because writing shapes and clarifies our understanding of our own thoughts and actions. Students are urged to emulate quality writing with the expectation that quality thinking will be fostered. We do understand that the use of language is an instrument of thinking (Bruner, 1966) and that there is an interplay between writing and thinking (Vygotsky, 1962). The developmental theories of Jean Piaget (1968), Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), and William Perry (1981), suggest that the quality of writing may also be constrained by the student's level of intellectual growth, by her/his thinking ability. Scholars and teachers are searching for a clearer understanding of the interplay between intellectual growth and student writing. The four papers in this section reflect that search.

The first, by Joanne Kurfiss, reviews the developmental theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Perry and illustrates how these theories portray the epistemological experience of college students. These theories assume that a student's intellectual preparation interacts with her/his environment to produce a dynamic that motivates growth.

The student must work within the dynamic to resolve conflicts or inconsistencies, conditions Piaget calls "disequilibrium." The teacher's goal is to create a tension that will encourage intellectual growth. In the second paper, Christopher Burnham introduces a prac-

tical approach to writing exercises, the use of student journals to motivate and to promote intellectual growth and writing improvement. He illustrates how writing assumes a vital energy as the student attempts to integrate his/her present, past, and projected future. Through Burnham's article, we sense the power a student can achieve when he/she is allowed to play with thinking through writing.

The third article, by Janice Hays, describes research about the analytic and argumentative writing of high school and college students. Hays discusses eleven dimensions of writing that appear to fit within the Perry's developmental framework and to distinguish more mature from less mature writers. She closes by describing the transitions that most mature writers have completed, transitions that are also related to Kohlberg's (1981) and Gilligan's (1982) theories of ethical reasoning.

In the final paper, Lois Barry discusses the benefits of including a broad variety of writing subjects in courses. She suggests how the content of writing assignments can enhance or inhibit student's intellectual growth, and she illustrates a variety of methods for extending the range of writing activities, including the use of ungraded writing assignments. The key to her presentation is the notion that writing is an active form of learning, particularly in comparison to listening and reading.

In reading these articles, one longs to return to college for a replay of those boring, apparently irrelevant writing assignments. One is even tempted to suggest that writing should be an avenue to enjoying learning in college!

Michael Davis

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